

Easter 6B, 2009

Text: John 15:9-17

Title: Slave or Friend?

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It's easier to be a slave than a friend.

Being a slave is easy. It's simple. It's straightforward. You do what your master tells you to do because you have to. You have no choice. If you decide not to obey your master, you will be punished. No negotiating, no bargaining. Obey or else.

I'm not saying that the work is easy. But its easy to know who you are and what you should do. You have no choice. It's very simple. You're a slave and you do whatever your master tells you to do.

Being a friend is much more difficult. It's complicated. You don't have to do what your friend tells you to do. You have a choice. If your friend asks you to do something, you are free to say "No." You are free to come up with excuses, to ignore and neglect your friends if you so choose.

But you are also free to say "Yes." Friends do not force each other. Friends ask, friends make requests, friends beg and plead, but friends do not demand, friends do not give orders. And when friends ask, friends say "yes" because of love.

A slaves serves out of fear. A friend serves out of love.

Jesus says that He now calls us friends. We once were slaves, but now we are friends. Your NIV text says "servants," but that's softening things up a bit. The word here is "slave", one who has no will of his own, but belongs to another. So you were once slaves, but now you are friends of God.

It's easier to be God's slave than God's friend. Most people think of God as their Lord and Master. It makes more sense. He's strong and mighty and powerful and we are small and puny and insignificant.

God makes demands that we have to follow. Obey or else. Do God's will or He'll zap you good. So be good. Follow God's rules and He'll be nice to you, be easy on you. Many obey God simply out of fear that they'll be punished.

Now there is some truth to this picture of God. He is our Lord and Master. He does have His laws and rules for us to follow. If we disobey we will be punished. We should fear God. But God did not create you to be His slave. God made you to be His friend.

Remember how things were in the garden. God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve and had friendly chats with them. They were not His slaves. They were His friends. He had one

simple request. Don't do this one thing. He made the request out of love for them. He knew they'd be better off not eating from that tree.

But Satan convinced Adam and Eve that God was not their friend. Satan convinced them that God only wanted to control them and rule their lives. Satan convinced them that they were really slaves, and they need to start a rebellion. You know how the story ends. Since Adam and Eve would not have God as their friend, He became their master, and He had to punish them.

If you will not be God's friend, you will be God's slave. But that's not the way God wants it to be. He doesn't want you to live in fear of punishment. He doesn't want you to obey Him out of fear. He wants you to be free to love Him. God doesn't want you to be His slave, He wasn't to have you as His friend.

How do you become God's friend? Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I choose you." Jesus chose you to be His friend. When Jesus wanted a friend, He chose you. In Holy Baptism Jesus reached down and said, "Will you be my friend?"

Now you can't force someone to be your friend. You can't use threats to make them your friend. "Be my friend or else!" Then you don't have a friend, but a slave.

Friendship can be rejected. Friendship means that you can say, "No." Friendship is based on love, not fear.

Jesus took a risk in making you His friend. Jesus risked being rejected. Jesus knew there was a chance you could say "No." But Jesus wants you as His friend, not His slave. He allows you to reject Him. Jesus loves you so much that He will not force you.

You are Jesus' friends. He chose you to be His friends.

What does that mean for us? Jesus says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." "Command" is a bit harsh. "Instruct" is better. "You are my friends if you follow my instructions."

Jesus is not laying harsh demands on you. He's not about giving you orders to follow. He's just telling you what it means to be a friend. Jesus says, "This is my command:" or "These are my instructions:" "Love one another."

It's not complicated. It's not difficult or hard to understand. "Love one another." That's what it means to be Jesus' friend. Love one another. Doing God's will is not difficult to understand. Everyone once in awhile people have true moral dilemmas when they don't know what's right or wrong. But that's the rare exception. Nearly all of the time you know what you should do, the problem is doing it. Most of the time you'd just rather do something else.

Everything you do is an expression of love. You either choose to love yourself and serve yourself or to love your neighbor and serve your neighbor. You either choose to love yourself or to love your neighbor.

Loving yourself is not real love. It is selfish and it is sinful. Love flows from person to person. It does not stop with yourself. The Father loves the Son. The Son loves you. You love one another. Love is directed out and not in.

If you want to know what love looks like. If you want to know what friendship looks like, look to the cross, and look to the altar. Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends."

You are Jesus' friends and He loves you. He loves you so much that He lays down His life for you. He laid down His life on the cross, and now He gives Himself to you in the Lord's Supper. Jesus gave everything. He didn't hold anything back. He gave all that He had for you. Because He loves you. That's what friends do.

We don't deserve Jesus' love. We're not very good friends. We're lazy, selfish friends. We're the friends that you call for a favor, but they're always busy. We're the friends who borrow things and never return them. We're the friends who forget birthdays, who give lousy gifts, and just want to talk about ourselves and our problems all the time. We're not very good friends.

But Jesus still loves us and wants us to be His friends. He does not want us to be His slaves. He doesn't want us to live in fear of Him. He doesn't make demands of us, He doesn't force us to obey Him. But He still gives us instructions, requests, because He loves us.

Those instructions can be summed up in one word. "Love." When Jesus was asked the greatest commandment, He said, "Love God and love your neighbor."

Love God and don't love those false gods who only want to enslave you.
Love God and call upon His name when you need to talk.
Love God and come here so He can serve you every week.
Love one another, especially your parents by honoring them.
Love one another, and don't hurt each other.
Love one another, especially your husband or wife and be faithful to them.
Love one another, and don't take each other's things.
Love one another, and don't tell lies about each other.
Love one another, and be happy with what's yours.

This is what it means to be a friend. To live a life of love - not because you're afraid of punishment, but because you've been loved.

It's easier to be a slave than a friend. It's easier to live under the Law, and obey because you have to. It's harder to be a friend. It's harder to live under the freedom of the gospel, and to love one another. It's hard but Jesus calls us to be friends. He forgives us when we're bad friends, and He keeps loving us so that we can love one another.

Thanks be to God.